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Letter dated 24 October 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you the address by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Acting President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, at the opening ceremony of the forty-third session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held in Tashkent on 18 and 19 October 2016 (see annex).

I would appreciate if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 126, "Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations".

(*Signed*) Muzaffarbek **Madrakhimov**

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Annex to the letter dated 24 October 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Address by the Acting President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, H.E. Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, at the opening ceremony of the forty-third session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

Dear guests, heads of delegations of member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), observer States, representatives of international organizations and all participants in the forty-third session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, allow me to wholeheartedly welcome you to Uzbekistan and convey to you my deepest respect.

We are sincerely grateful that the capital city of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, was selected as the venue for this important forum of OIC, which is one of the largest and most influential institutions for multilateral cooperation in the world today.

We are confident that the current session will mark a significant step towards achieving such noble goals as preserving and promoting sacred Islamic values, strengthening solidarity among Muslim peoples, ensuring sustainable development, and supporting progress and prosperity for the peoples of the OIC member States.

We are also deeply gratified by the nature and the level of cooperation achieved in the run-up to this forum and we highly appreciate the fruitful work done by the General Secretariat of the Organization and, on an individual basis, by its head, Mr. Iyad Madani. That includes the spirit of mutual understanding and the cooperative attitude demonstrated by all member States.

It is highly symbolic that the main theme on the agenda of the Council's forty-third session is "Education and Enlightenment — the Path to Peace and Creativity". This idea is firmly in keeping with the well-known hadith which reads: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave". The theme for this session was proposed by the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, H.E. Mr. Islam Karimov, a great statesman who had tremendous life experience, having profoundly reflected on the fate of the world, his people and the role of our sacred religion in the current challenging times.

Today, in a rapidly changing world of new threats and challenges to the stability and sustainable development of our peoples, it is more important than ever to pay attention to enlightenment, to spiritual and moral underpinnings, and to inculcating in youth the desire for knowledge and the need for self-improvement.

For it is enlightenment and education that are the key to the prosperity of peoples. It is enlightenment and education that lead people towards benevolence, goodness and tolerance. This is what our faith, holy Islam, teaches us.

This approach is a pressing imperative.

It is certainly no coincidence that "Education and Enlightenment — the Path to Peace and Creativity" was selected as the theme of today's Tashkent forum of OIC.

Indeed, this meeting is taking place in Uzbekistan, the land where our great ancestors lived and produced their works.

The names of Imam Bukhari, Burhanuldin Marghinani, Isa Tirmidhi, Hakim Tirmidhi, Mahmud Zamakhshari, Muhammad Qaffal Shashi, Baha'uldin Naqshband, Khwajah Ahrar Wali, Muhammad Khwarizmi, Ahmad Farghani, Abu Rayhan Biruni, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Mirza Ulugbek, Ali-Shir Nava'i and many, many other geniuses are inscribed in gold letters in the history not only of Islam but of world civilization.

Recognized around the Islamic world as the most authoritative compendium of hadiths of our Prophet Muhammad, the *Sahih al-Bukhari* is the result of many years of dedicated research by Imam Bukhari, renowned as "the leader of all hadith scholars". For more than 12 centuries, it has served as the second most important source book in Islam after the holy Koran. Millions of Muslims from our country and other States aspire to visit the birthplace of Imam Bukhari in sacred Bukhara, and to pay homage at his graveside in Samarkand.

Originating in the tenth century from the Samarkand thinker Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, renowned as Imam *al-Huda* (Imam of the right path), the teachings of al-Maturidi spread widely across the Islamic world. His teachings attach great importance to the role and value of human reason and tolerance in the learning process. This was instrumental in the broad dissemination of Islamic values, and humanity today badly needs such ideas.

Great history does not disappear without a trace. It is stored and reproduced in the genetic code of the people, in their historical memory and in their acts. This is what makes them a powerful force. Preserving, studying and transferring our historical heritage from one generation to the next is a top priority for our State.

This is extremely important because new challenges are arising in today's globalizing world, including the threat from the ever increasing spread of "mass culture", the cult of consumerism and the danger of a breakdown in morality and values.

That is why I believe that today, more than ever before, we must preserve and build upon everything that defines human spirituality and a people's culture.

We cherish our sacred religion as the nexus of our ancestral values and moral imperatives. Islam means comprehending the truth. It cultivates in us a need to do good deeds and calls for goodness and peace from us as genuine human beings.

We strongly condemn and shall never accept those who equate Islam with violence and bloodshed. We shall protect our great faith from those seeking to discredit and abase it.

In the years since independence, once our people had freed themselves from militant atheism, a great deal of work was done in Uzbekistan to restore the role and place in society of our sacred religion, Islam.

The first Islamic University in Central Asia was founded in Tashkent in 1999. Today there are 10 Islamic educational institutions in the country, in particular, the

Tashkent Islamic Institute and nine specialized secondary schools, two of which are for women.

Among these institutions are the Mir-i-Arab Madrasah in Bukhara and the Kukeldash Madrasah in Tashkent, both built in the sixteenth century.

During its 70 years as a communist State, only 130 people from Uzbekistan were able to undertake the hajj. Today, however, more than 5,000 of our compatriots each year fulfil this cherished dream and duty as Muslims. Back then our Republic had many millions of people but only 30 mosques. Today there are thousands of them. Islamic historical monuments and holy places of pilgrimage have been reconstructed throughout the country, and you, dear guests, will have an opportunity to visit some of these during your stay in Uzbekistan.

There is no doubt that our sacred religion will continue to provide moral support for our people, serving as an indispensable tool for spiritual purification and conferring upon people such eternal values as the desire for peace, benevolence, tolerance, mutual respect and harmony, irrespective of ethnic, linguistic or religious differences.

In building Uzbekistan as an independent and strong State, the most important goal is to create a just society where human beings and their interests are of central value and where their rights and freedoms are respected. We wish to take our rightful place in the Muslim world and in the international community.

We are fully aware that this primarily entails improving the educational system, introducing the latest knowledge to our youth, who are the future of the country, and raising well-rounded and integrated individuals. As a result of the implementation of the national professional training programme adopted in 1997, as well as other State programmes, fundamental reforms have been carried out in this area and a modern comprehensive system of continuing education and training has been established.

Today, all of our children receive compulsory free secondary education. They learn in 10,000 spacious, bright and reconstructed or newly built schools, and in 1,500 academic high schools and vocational colleges. There are some 300 music and art schools and over 2,200 sports facilities available to children.

Since independence, the number of higher educational institutions in our country has increased by 2.5 times. More than 230,000 students are enrolled in these institutions today. There are branches of seven leading foreign universities in Uzbekistan, and thousands of our talented young people receive an education abroad in prestigious universities around the world.

In our country the State budget allocates 7 per cent of gross domestic product to the education sector. This figure is higher than in the most developed countries of the world (compared with 4.8 per cent in the United States of America; 4.2 per cent in Germany; 4.8 per cent in France; 3.5 per cent in Japan; and 4.1 per cent in the Republic of Korea).

Youth policy has been considered a critical priority of Government policy since the early years of independence. The revised Act of the Republic of Uzbekistan on State youth policy was recently adopted in order to further deepen our work in this area.

All of this is already bearing fruit. Our young people are making impressive strides in business, science, culture, art, literature and sports. And this gives us good reason to look to the future with confidence and to believe that the deeds of our great ancestors will be duly continued by successive generations.

Today we are living at a historical stage in human progress which may literally be described as groundbreaking.

In recent years far-reaching geopolitical changes have taken place in the world and the old systems of security and stability have collapsed. The process of globalization, which is leading not only to an expansion of human capabilities, but also to a sharpening of contradictions and widening of the gap between rich and poor countries, is rapidly accelerating. The combination of all these processes has given rise to unprecedented threats to peace and stability, which, in both essence and scope, have transnational effects.

We are witnessing the grief and suffering of people who have lost their homes and are wandering in foreign lands. We are seeing how, as a result of armed conflicts and terrorist acts, innocent children, old people and women are dying. We are witnessing the tragedy of the devastation of entire States and wars which seem endless.

In these conditions, OIC, which seeks to unite the efforts of member States in order to strengthen peace, security, stability and sustainable development in the Muslim world, facilitate the establishment of reliable cooperation mechanisms and create a unique platform for dialogue among member States on the most urgent issues, has an ever-increasing role and responsibility.

We are deeply appreciative that OIC conducts its work on the basis of an understanding that lasting stability and security are impossible to achieve without economic development and the resolution of social problems. The need to further expand the range of activities of OIC is becoming increasingly clear.

In this regard, an important role can and should be played by an intensification of dialogue among countries and peoples under equal conditions, and regularization of contacts not only among Governments but also among Parliaments, scientific and cultural figures and the general public. It is precisely these objectives which can and should underpin the consolidation of multilateral cooperation within the framework of OIC.

As the current Chair of the Council of Foreign Ministers of OIC, the Republic of Uzbekistan will do its best to contribute to the further strengthening of the potential of the organization and to the achievement of its noble goals.

During the period of its chairmanship of the Council, Uzbekistan will advocate a strengthening of the role of OIC as an effective and authoritative forum of Muslim States. The slogan "Education and Enlightenment — the Path to Peace and Creativity" clearly and precisely reflects our view of the priorities. The most important priorities are:

First: under contemporary conditions, when the main indicator of the competitiveness of a country is increasingly becoming the standard of living and quality of life of its population, the role of education is growing as the most

important factor of progress. Today societies and civilizations are competing above all in social values and educational systems.

In this context, it is especially important to study in depth, understand fully and popularize widely the legacy of our great ancestors, the scholars of the Islamic world, and their inestimable contribution to the development of world civilization.

This issue is important for instilling in young people a desire for knowledge and for education, ensuring a proper understanding and acceptance of Islamic values and culture in all societies, and imparting to all peoples of the world the true essence of Islam. This is especially important today in order to establish an inter-faith, inter-ethnic and inter-cultural dialogue at the international level and achieve peace and tranquillity.

Second: sustainable socioeconomic progress is impossible to imagine without innovative development, broad scientific and technical cooperation and the incorporation of new technologies and advances in science and technology.

That is precisely why we believe that the further advancement of science and technology and strengthening of the intellectual potential of the OIC member States must take priority in the work of OIC.

Uzbekistan proposes an intensification of scientific and technological exchanges and the conduct of joint research in various scientific fields with partner countries within the framework of OIC.

There is no question that it is difficult to conceive of cooperation among OIC member States without the involvement of the Islamic Development Bank.

I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Bandar Hajjar on his election on 1 October 2016 as President of the Islamic Development Bank.

Third: we note with concern that security problems are becoming increasingly acute and distressing.

It is very important in resolving unabating conflicts and countering threats to peace and stability to ensure unity among the OIC member States, overcome disagreements among them and combine efforts to combat wars, terrorism and extremism. It is particularly important to try to resolve existing or new contradictions and conflicts through peaceful negotiations, using political, diplomatic and international legal mechanisms on the basis of the universally recognized principles and norms of international law.

Fourth: the Islamic world possesses enormous economic and investment potential as well as energy resources. Their rational use, the expansion of international trade, economic, financial and investment cooperation among OIC member States, and the establishment of transport corridors linking our countries will make it possible to achieve high rates of economic growth which will ultimately serve as the basis for progress in all other areas.

In this regard, it is especially important to enhance mechanisms for cooperation in this sphere within the framework of OIC, and also between States of the OIC area and other leading countries of the world.

Fifth: taking advantage of the opportunity and in the context of achieving one of the proposed priority goals during our country's chairmanship of OIC, I should like to announce some initiatives by Uzbekistan.

The first initiative consists of establishing an international scientific research centre for the study of the multifaceted religious and spiritual heritage of our great ancestors, who made a unique contribution not only to Islamic culture but also to the progress of civilization throughout the world.

It would be logical to establish that centre at the Imam Bukhari memorial complex in Samarkand. This would be advantageous for a number of reasons:

- Firstly, the historic role of Samarkand in world civilization as one of the pearls of Muslim culture;
- Secondly, the unique spiritual and moral atmosphere in this area, where the sacred mausoleum of one of the great scholars of the Muslim world, Imam Bukhari, is located.

The proposed research centre could be named "The Imam Bukhari international research centre in Samarkand" under the auspices of OIC.

We hope that the Secretary General of OIC, His Excellency Mr. Iyad Madani, will support our initiative and that he will extend the necessary support to the implementation of this project.

Another initiative by Uzbekistan is the establishment of a special chair of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization at Tashkent Islamic University.

The main field of activity of the new chair will be study of the history and current state of education, science and culture in the Muslim world and organization of advanced specialized courses for students.

We hope that your acquaintance with the rich historical and cultural heritage of our country in the course of the forum and of your stay in Uzbekistan will further strengthen our ties in the area of tourism and in humanitarian, scientific and other spheres.

In this regard we, for our part, will take measures to simplify the formalities for the entry and exit of tourists and representatives of OIC member States.

Sixth: the problem of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains one of the most acute problems of the present day. As early as 1993 Uzbekistan put forward the initiative to establish a non-nuclear zone in Central Asia. This initiative found practical embodiment in the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia signed by Uzbekistan and neighbouring States in 2006, and also the Protocol on safeguards signed by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council in 2014.

Uzbekistan advocates the steady expansion of nuclear-weapon-free zones and supports the idea of establishing a non-nuclear zone in the Middle East.

We are convinced that, acting together, the member States will be able to make their countries, and the Muslim world as a whole, safer and more prosperous.

I am confident that the forty-third session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers will serve to further strengthen the potential and enhance the authority of our organization in the international arena and contribute to the efficient accomplishment of the common tasks before us.

In concluding my address, I have pleasure in inviting you to visit the beautiful, unique city of the East — ancient Samarkand. There you will not only experience the antiquity and grandeur of priceless historical and cultural monuments, but also see how our people and our youth live today and learn about our schools, high schools, colleges and higher educational institutions.

I wish you every success in the work of the forty-third session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic States.